

Safely Reopening Texas Public Schools



Texas needs a flexible, common sense plan for safely reopening schools this fall. Texas AFT has developed guidance based on current scientific understanding of the new coronavirus, as well as input from educators and school staff.

Phased reopening, on a community-by-community basis

The infrastructure to make on-campus instruction safer takes time. Doing things the right way normally does. If districts do things the fast (and wrong) way, employees and students will get sick, and schools will be forced to close once again.

- Reducing the number of new cases in a community is a prerequisite for reopening.
- Campuses should be allowed to start the school year with virtual instruction only and be allowed to re-evaluate at the end of the first nine weeks.
- In-person, on-campus instruction should be phased in based on any given campus' capacity to comply with CDC and other health and safety guidelines. All plans must consider local rates of COVID-19 cases and transmissions.
- Schools should limit in-person instruction until the number of new cases declines for 14 consecutive days.

Infrastructure and resources to test, trace and isolate new cases — before reopening

You can't transition from community-focused physical distancing to localized case-specific interventions without ramping up the capacity to test, trace and isolate each new case.

- Before reopening, community health authorities should be able to deploy the public health tools that prevent the virus' spread. They also need to work with districts to implement these tools in ways that align with education strategies and meet student needs.
- Testing, tracing and isolation must be one part of a community health response, along with other efforts like physical distancing, proper handwashing, the use of personal protective equipment and availability of other community support services (e.g., mental health services or support for food insecurity).

Workers, unions, parents and communities involved in all planning

Rebuilding community after a complex public health and economic crisis involves thousands of people navigating recovery. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

- Schools, colleges, hospitals and local and state governments need to engage workers and community stakeholders in the decision-making process. It's the only way to ensure reopening plans are responsive to the specific vulnerabilities of each situation.
- Without transparency and joint decision-making, you risk distrust and the spread of misinformation, as well as a lack of compliance with reopening plans.

An investment in recovery and America's future

The path to recovery requires more investment in public health and in our schools, universities, hospitals and local and state governments. Strengthening communities and addressing inequities should be a priority.

- Gaps in technology, access to broadband, and food and housing insecurities have all been exacerbated by the pandemic.
- Strategic investment and collaboration are required to ensure students and families have the ability to access high-quality education in a safe environment — on campus or through virtual options from their homes.
- The pandemic has shown that schools serve as more than just an academic resource to students and families. Schools and educators need additional support, resources and training to help meet the needs of students wrestling with the impact of COVID-19.